



Study of Alternative Education Options

November 28, 2006
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Study Mandate

The Commission on Youth is to:

- Explore data available at the Department of Education regarding the number of school suspensions and expulsions within Virginia to determine whether a problem exists in Virginia public schools;
- Conduct a review of Alternative Education programs utilized in the Commonwealth for suspended and expelled youth.



Recent Study Activities

- **Survey of Alternative Education Programs for Suspended/Expelled Youth**
 - A survey was sent to 132 school divisions requesting information on alternative education programs for students who have been suspended or expelled.
 - The survey will identify local alternative education programs created and utilized by school divisions, as well their funding and structure.
 - Data from the survey will be used to determine how students are receiving educational services when they are suspended or expelled, as well as the cost and composition of these schools/programs.
 - Survey responses were due November 27.



Preliminary Review of Survey Responses

- Local alternative education programs serve students ages 13-18.
- The programs are typically small, serving under 150 students.
- Most localities offer educational services to students who have been long-term suspended or expelled.
- Approximately 20% of students enrolled have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Rural areas have a higher percentage of students with an IEP.
- Average student to teacher ratio is 10:1.
- Most programs are funded with local appropriations.
- There is a need for tailored settings or vocational programs for students that do not present disciplinary problems but also do not function well in the typical classroom setting.



Issues from October 3 Commission Meeting

- Youth charged with serious crimes off of school property (rape, murder, arson), and the provision of education services for special education students in these circumstances
- The relationship between the composite index and funding for alternative education programs
- The number of students who are suspended or expelled and not offered any educational services



Students Charged with Serious Crimes off of School Property

- Pursuant to Va. Code § 16.1- 260(g), the superintendent and principal are notified by law enforcement if a student is charged with one of the listed serious offenses that would be a crime if committed by an adult.
- If the student is adjudicated delinquent of one of the listed offenses, the superintendent is notified within 15 days under Va. Code § 16.1-305.1.
- If the student is found not guilty, or if the charges are withdrawn, dismissed or reduced to an offense not included in the list, the school is notified of that as well.
- The school division may opt to suspend or expel the student for the alleged offense pursuant to Va. Code § 22.1-277.06.C. based on the nature and seriousness of the violation, the degree of danger to the school community, the student's disciplinary history, and other matters as deemed to be appropriate.



Disciplinary Removal of Special Education Students

- When a special education student is removed from his current educational setting, schools are not required to provide services during the first 10 school days in a school year if services are not provided to a student without a disability who has been similarly removed.
- For every additional removal from school that is less than 10 school days in a school year, but exceeds 10 cumulative school days of removal, and is not deemed a change in placement, the school will provide the student with services that are necessary in achieving the goals in the student's IEP.
- The procedures for determining services during periods of removals are:
 - For removals for more than 10 school days in a school year which do not constitute a change in placement, school personnel, in consultation with the student's special education teacher, make the service determinations; and
 - For removals that constitute a change in placement, the IEP team determines what services are needed.

Source: Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia.



State Funding for Regional Alternative Education Programs

- State funds for Regional Alternative Education programs are provided for the purpose of educating certain expelled students, students who received long-term suspensions, and students returned to the community from DJJ.
- Funding is based on a per pupil cost calculated using a program staffing model based on 50 students in the program.
- From this calculated per pupil cost, the basic aid per pupil amount by division is deducted to determine an “add-on” per pupil amount above basic aid for each division for alternative education.
- The number of allocated alternative education student slots per division is then multiplied by the add-on per pupil amount and adjusted for the composite index to determine the state payment.



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Calculation of Regional Alternative Education Per Pupil Amounts for FY07 and FY08 (Non Cost of Competing Divisions)

Position Title	Base-Year Salary	FY07 Funded Salary & Benefits	FY08 Funded Salary & Benefits	Number of Positions Funded	FY07 Total Salary & Benefits Cost	FY08 Total Salary & Benefits Cost
Principal	75,268	94,998	97,340	1	94,998	97,340
Teacher (10:1 Ratio)	41,615	54,434	55,729	5	272,170	278,645
Aide	13,828	20,942	21,372	2	41,884	42,744
Counselor/Psychologist	41,615	54,434	55,729	1	54,434	55,729
Administrative Support	23,999	33,037	33,662	1	33,037	33,662
Security	23,361	31,747	32,085	1	31,747	32,085
total salary and benefits cost for a 50-student program =					528,270	540,205
					number of students =	50
*Reg. Alt. Ed. Per Pupil Cost (total cost / # of students) =					10,565	10,804

Source: Department of Education, 2006.



Funding for Regional Alternative Education Programs

- *The basic aid per pupil amount for each division is deducted from the regional alternative education programs per pupil cost to determine the incremental or add-on per pupil amount actually used from funding, as shown below:

A. Regional Alternative Education Per Pupil Cost =	10,565
B. Basic Aid Per Pupil for Sample Division =	5,000
C. Regional Alternative Education Per Pupil Amount For Sample Division (A-B=C) =	5,565*

- Final funding formula for program: # of approved student slots per division x add-on per pupil amount for division x 1 – div. composite index = Regional Alternative Education.



Funding for Regional Alternative Education Programs

- Reallocation of unused Regional Alternative Education slots is permitted pursuant to a provision contained in the 2006-2008 Appropriations Act.
- A school division must request from the Department of Education the availability of any unused student slots.
 - If unused slots are available, and if the requesting school division chooses to utilize any of the unused slots, the requesting school division will receive only the state's share of tuition for the unused slot that was allocated for the originally designated school division.
 - Additionally, no requesting school division will receive more tuition funding from the state for any requested unused slot than what would have been the calculated amount for the requesting school division had the unused slot been allocated to the requesting school division in the original budget.
 - Finally, the requesting school division shall pay for any remaining tuition payment necessary for using a previously unused slot.

Source: Department of Education, Supt. Memo 197, 2006.



State Funding for Alternative Education Programs

- The per pupil funding for the regional alternative education programs does not "follow the student."
- Under the current funding methodology and Appropriation Act language, the per pupil funding does not allow students or associated funding to move between existing or to new regional programs.
- Reallocation of slots across programs provides some portability, but this is subject to the availability of unused slots and not at the discretion of the individual programs.
- Students enrolled in regional alternative education programs are counted in the average daily membership (ADM) of their home school division and are provided all of the typical state funding distributed on the basis of ADM like any other student.
- In addition, there is incremental state funding provided for the regional alternative education program, which is the state share of the incremental amount between each division's Basic Aid per pupil amount and the \$10,565 per pupil amount for the regional program.
- There is no authority to use these funds to individually place students directly into private programs.
- The school divisions' maintain control and supervision over the program.



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Recommendations



Finding

- *Virginia's Regional Alternative Education programs were established to provide options for students who no longer have access to traditional school programs because they were suspended or expelled. There are 114 school divisions participating in these 29 regional programs. These regional programs are required to report data to the Department of Education. However, there is a lack of data on local alternative education programs/practices.*

Recommendation 1 (No Commission Approval Required)

- The Commission on Youth will survey school divisions to receive a complete picture of local alternative education programs and ascertain whether there are unmet service needs. The results of the survey shall be communicated to the Virginia Commission on Youth.



Virginia Commission on Youth

Finding

- *There is no available information on the programs/practices that effectively serve youth who have been suspended or expelled. There is a need for more awareness of best practices in alternative education programs. Moreover, local school divisions are frequently unaware of available programs that exist in the Commonwealth. Such information could guide local school divisions in building programs and meeting service needs.*

Recommendation 2

- **The Commission on Youth will compile a best practices guide for alternative education programs/practices. The guide will include a listing of all existing alternative education programs across the Commonwealth, including local programs. This compilation will commence once survey data is analyzed and shall be conducted in cooperation with the Department of Education. The Commission shall complete the guide prior to the 2008 General Assembly Session.**



Finding

- *Regional Alternative Education programs are working and efficiently leveraging funds to serve youth across the Commonwealth. However, some localities do not participate in these programs. Furthermore, some programs indicate that they have waiting lists and that the division has unmet needs for students requiring alternative education placements.*

Recommendation 3

- **Request the Department of Education, in conjunction with the Commission on Youth, to investigate ways to increase funding for a second tier of regional alternative education programs. Such an investigation will be based on an analysis of survey results. Any proposal for a second tier of funding shall not dilute the funding already distributed to existing regional programs. The findings from this investigation shall be reported to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2008 General Assembly.**



Virginia Commission on Youth

Finding

- *There is a shortage of school-based prevention programs that address issues such as violence prevention, anger management, conflict resolution, and other behavioral health needs. These programs reduce suspensions and expulsions by offering valuable prevention services for youth who may be considered "at-risk." These programs have been negatively impacted by the reductions to the federal Safe and Drug-Free School grants. In 2006, the level of funding has decreased 21% and it is anticipated that there will be an additional 11% reduction in 2007.*

Recommendation 4

- **The Commission on Youth, in conjunction with various child-serving agencies, including the Departments of Education, Criminal Justice Services, Juvenile Justice, Health, and Social Services, will investigate ways to fund prevention programs to supplant funding lost in recent years from the decreases in the federal Safe and Drug-Free School grants. The findings from this investigation will be reported to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2008 General Assembly.**



Recommendation 5

- The Commission on Youth will continue to study alternative education program options and report findings to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2008 General Assembly Session.